



GALINA ULANOVA

THE MAKING OF A BALLERINA

SOVIET ARTS



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FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE

Moscow

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY S. ROSENBERG

DESIGNED BY I. FOMINA

Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

I did not really wish to be a ballet dancer. True, my first visit to the theatre fired my imagination, but I was not swept off my feet by that strong impulse for a stage career which precipitated so many to the footlights.

The first performance I saw was, of course, a ballet. My father, régisseur of the ballet troupe at the Imperial Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg, took me to see *The Sleeping Beauty*. All would have gone off well if at the appearance of the Fairy of Lilacs I had not cried out at the top of my voice: "That's mama, my mama!" The general embarrassment was great and the people sitting in the actors' box were quite shocked—why I could not understand. Had I not spoken the truth? The Fairy of Lilacs *was* my mother. She looked so enchanting in her lovely dress, her movements were so graceful, that I could not restrain my childish delight. I longed everyone to know that the illustrious fairy was my own mother, mine and no one else's.

Such was the theatre's first impact on me, made through the being I knew and loved best. And so warm and lasting has been that impression that to this day I cannot think of *The Sleeping Beauty*, or even ballet in general, without calling to mind that early vision of the Fairy of Lilacs.

To my own performances in *The Sleeping Beauty* and other ballets lay a long road of years at school and years of artistic adolescence. I set out on that road when the greatest social revolution in history took place. And I remember well enough, though it was so long ago, the police search of our rooms in the summer of 1917; and afterwards the flaming banners of the Revolution and the first shots heralding freedom's birth.

The Revolution infused new life into art, setting new aims and new tasks before it, and it fell to our honour to have a share in the making of the Soviet Theatre and the new Soviet ballet. However, an awareness of the noble mission of the Soviet artist, and of his responsibility to the people came to me later—in my mature years. At the time of the Revolution I was barely seven. At that tender age I could have no understanding either of historical events or of my own true calling in life.

And perhaps because I lacked prevision in the matter of my calling I “wept bitterly for fear when I was taken a stranger to my new home”^{*}—the Petrograd School of Choreography. I was taken there out of sheer necessity, and not only for educational reasons. The years following the Revolution were strenuous years and my parents were always busy; in addition to the ballet performances at the theatre, they gave three recitals a night before film audiences. Free recitals at cinema houses had become a regular practice with the leading actors and dancers of the academic theatres in their endeavour to bring art nearer to the people. I remember how, frozen and sleepy, I was carried in my father’s arms, from one of these recitals, through the bitter-cold, snow-swept city. As there was nobody to look after me at home, my parents could do nothing but take me along with them.

There comes a picture to my mind of my mother changing into her ballet shoes from clumsy felt boots and tying the pink ribbons with stiff, numb fingers in a cold little cubby-hole behind the screen. I remember her adjusting her crisp, tarlatan *tutus* and coming out on the stage platform with a smile. But the smile did not deceive me; I saw clearly how fatigued Mother was and what strain it cost her to dance. Is it surprising then that upon being told that I would be

^{*} This is quoted from Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin*.—Tr.

taught to dance I should reply most emphatically: "I don't want to!" Yet I found myself soon enough studying and boarding at the ballet school, because under the circumstances it was the easiest way out for my parents.

However, at the very first lesson, I pleaded with my mother, who was our teacher, to take me home. This I did over and over again, until Mother promised to take me from the school at the New Year. I was delighted, and settled down to my lessons. But then shortly before the happy day I caught myself thinking that I was not so anxious to quit after all. I had made friends, among them Tanya Veche-slova and other girls. I was being taught by my own mother and many other good instructors. And though I had difficulty with the exercises at the *barre*, I felt that I had learned something. A childish pride in my achievements awakened in me an appreciation and respect for what we were doing at school.

I was growing fond of the lessons, of the rhythmic movements, and the system we followed in the exercises. Moreover, I was flattered to be singled out, along with Tanya Vecheslova and a few other girls, from among the whole lot of Class-One pupils to dance in a real ballet at the Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre. True, "dance" is hardly the word for the few "crawling movements" we performed as lady-birds in Drigo's *Caprices of a Butterfly*. All the same this "*début*" gave me my first sensation of the stage and my first experience of stage-fright as the dark chasm of the auditorium yawned before me. It also gave me my first joy at the thought that, thank goodness, I had made no slips, had followed the music and the count as I had been taught in class. Afterwards I got my first "role," that of a bird in Rimsky-Korsakov's *Snow Maiden*. We children had quite a clear idea of what the fairy-tale was about and what was happening on the stage. We clustered eagerly around beautiful Spring and the clear tinkling

of the music seemed to bring to us the freshness of the morning and the first breath of warmth.

We were children and it is with the psychology of children that we tackled the problems presented by our "roles." It was then quite easy for me to believe, or clearly imagine, that I was a lady-bird or a little spring bird. Children will let their imagination run away with them. What a pity that this childish credulity in the make-believe world of the stage, called for by Stanislavsky all his life, is so difficult to retain in later years, and that one must put in so much effort before one can really "live" a character, that is, believe in it so utterly, as to make the audience believe in it too. To a great measure, in my early "roles," I was merely a child at play, to whom the world of imagination was more real than life.

However, more than anything else, even in childhood, I regarded my performances as work with which I was charged and which I must do to the best of my ability. And to do my very best I *must* go through a daily grind. I must . . . the sense of obligation that went with these words had made me a hard plodder long before I had a real inclination to be a creative artist, long before I came to understand the problems inherent in each role.

For this deep-rooted sense of duty, fostered in me in early childhood, I am indebted to the Soviet ballet school and to the example, always before me, of my parents, indefatigable toilers of the ballet.

A dancer must be a hard plodder. Daily practice is his meat and drink and it must never cease, not even during summer holidays. I was still very young when I realized that airiness, beauty and inspiration in the dance can be achieved only through the greatest effort. I do not wish to sound pompous—I have never cared for high-flown phrases which, I think, fall short of expressing the true essence of our thoughts—yet, if we must explain what makes for the mastery

and excellence of an artist, it is best to recall Gorky's words: talent is work. That is what he said, I believe.

Konstantin Sergeyevich Stanislavsky practically said the same thing over thirty years ago when he addressed a group of young actors of the Moscow Art Theatre before the opening night of *The Battle of Life*. "It may seem to the average spectator," he said, "that the prima ballerina's dancing in *Swan Lake* or *Don Quixote* is 'joy' rather than work. But little does he know how much attention, effort and actual *work* Yekaterina Geltser put in to *prepare* her famous *pas-de-deux* in these ballets, nor what she looks like in her dressing-room after the performance. Perspiration streams down her face and in her heart she reproaches herself for the least *nuance* she had failed to convey. . . . There is, of course, the 'joy of creation.' It does come to the real artist—but only after supreme effort in his chosen and dearly loved field when the *lofty aim* he sets himself is attained."

The words "lofty aim" (as well as a number of others) were underscored by Stanislavsky. To set oneself a lofty aim and to attain it—that is what gives meaning to art. However, at the time I went to school it did not occur to anybody to discuss such matters with ballet dancers. Indeed, even after graduation we were left adrift where the more profound aspects of our art were concerned. Perform on the stage as you were taught at school! Work for technical excellence! Such was the simple credo of those days.

Of course, our work was not only physical—involving arms, legs and body. It was work of the intellect and heart as well. The intellect has its share in whatever the ballet dancer does. It is developed through the stimulation of not so much the theatre, music, librettos and choreographers, as of the environment that surrounds one beginning with one's childhood and school-days. The dancer will think independently,

and boldly, will have broadness of vision only as he assimilates life's experiences, and as he masters the greatest of all sciences—the science of life. Of this significance of the knowledge and experience of life I shall speak later, when describing what I call my “coming of age school.” But now whenever I think of my apprentice years they appear to me as one long period of plodding, work of the arms, legs and body—an everlasting grind at the *barre*.

However, it would be wrong and self-deceiving to say that I never grudged the time I spent in my youth and in later years over my eternal drills. I remember only too well the bright summer mornings during my holidays—I was then already grown-up and quite independent—when almost in tears I would approach the detested *barre*. I had a feeling as though a millstone were fixed about my neck. At that moment I hated the ballet, remembering with satisfaction that one of our poets had called it “that cruel art of ours.” How I longed (especially if it was in summer and I lived on the shore of my beloved Lake Seliger) to drop what I was doing and follow my friends to the lake, climb into my canoe and paddle, paddle for all I was worth, over the shimmering expanse of the water, beneath the blue sky, and amid the rustling of the bulrushes. . . . But a hateful voice inside me kept whispering: “Work! Work! If you don’t, you’ll get nowhere, you’ll be nothing but a *figurante*. . . . Work!”

Then a strange thing would happen. After only a few minutes of the drills I would feel the millstone lifting. A blessed relief would come over me. The thought that I had not shirked my duty, that I had resisted the temptation of going out and having a good time before my work was done, gave me a sense of satisfaction that bordered on vanity. And when the drills were done and I could call it a day I knew that I had earned my right to enjoy myself. It was good to get into the canoe, and catch up with my friends. . . .

This deeply-ingrained sense of duty in regard to my profession and my strict keeping to routine helped me to form a lifelong habit of working for improvement, which in many respects is responsible for the successes that have fallen to my lot.

When I graduated from ballet school my technique was still not of the order which, from a dictator, holding the dancer in perpetual dread of making a slip, becomes her helpmate, so trusty as to never obtrude either on herself or on the audience.

As I vaguely recall my graduation performance—I danced the lead in *Chopiniana*—and my *début* in the theatre as Princess Florina in the to-me-so-memorable *Sleeping Beauty*, I must admit that technically and otherwise my dancing fell short of my expectations.

When I came on the stage I was seized by stage-fright which I suppose every dancer experiences on his *début*. What seemed good at the rehearsals fell flat at the performance. I danced, trying my best, but was being wafted away somewhere. My mind was a complete blank. I felt nothing, nothing except fear and a frantic anxiety to do everything just as I had been taught.

Even the leading ballet parts, such as Odette-Odelia in Chaikovsky's *Swan Lake*, which I was given at the age of eighteen, four months after my *début*, I danced without deeply understanding the characters I impersonated. This is true not just of my first year on the stage but for all of four or five years.

All those early years of my stage career were spent in falling into the swing of theatre life, in ridding myself of the habits and rhythm of the apprentice, in growing stronger in body and in acquiring the plastic poise and confidence which are so essential to the ballet dancer.

In discussing the plastic ideal which every artist must strive to attain, K. S. Stanislavsky wrote: "There are dancers and dramatic

actors who have once and for all trained themselves to be plastic so that they need no longer think of that side of their physical movement. Plastic movement has become second nature with them. Such dancers and actors do not dance, do not act, but move as is natural to them, and they cannot help doing it plastically."

This is the ideal and one must strive energetically all one's life to approach it. And if, as a result, plastic movement does not become second nature, it will at least be organic and natural, an integral part of one's stage habits. I do not know of such ballerinas or dancers who "need no longer give thought to that side of physical movement," actually to the technique of the dance. If there are such darlings of Terpsichore, I, alas, am not one of them. Whenever I dance, no matter what the ballet is, I am conscious of every movement I make, and the more difficult the dance is the more mindful I am of the technical details. Dancing Juliet for the hundredth or even the five-hundredth time I shall still not be able to perform the very difficult steps of the *adagios* in the first and second acts without preparing inwardly for them.

What is essential (as it seems to me) is to command technique with sufficient freedom to enable you to express the principal idea of the dance: the boundlessness of the feeling in Juliet's heart, the tremulous transports of Odette's love. Moreover, technical perfection should be such that the public should never notice, never suspect that any movement costs the dancer the least strain. The dance must flow smoothly in clear-cut, finely traced lines, like those which stamp the work of great graphic artists.

And indeed, the beauty and humaneness of the ballet heroine's emotions cannot be expressed unless complete mastery of technique is achieved, not perhaps to the extent that the dancer "need no longer think of it" but at least so that her technique should not obtrude itself on the audience.

In speaking of technique I have in mind not only the line of the dance and the virtuosity of movement (which is generally implied by a ballerina's "brilliant technique") but ballet technique in a broad sense. This includes the plastic moulding of the forms of the dance, the contact of dancing partners, and the ability to perfectly express *the substance of the music* (not merely to capture the musical rhythm which any trained dancer can do). Only when the composer's music reaches into the very depths of the dancer's soul does her technique approach excellence, and her portrayals of character move the audience.

When, after five years of dancing in the theatre, I was cast as the Swan in Vaganova's version of *Swan Lake*, this role acquired special significance in my development as a dancer.

Dancing this part for many years, I was able to invest it with new meaning after my work on Maria in Asafyev's *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*. This ballet (of which I shall speak later on in greater detail) made me realize much more broadly my potentialities as a dancer. It brought so much that was new to my problems in the dance, making them so much more "human," that I could no longer perform any of my other parts in the old way.

Masha in *Nutcracker*, Aurora in *The Sleeping Beauty*, the Komsomol Girl in Shostakovich's *Golden Age*, Raymonde, Solveig in Grieg's *Ice-Maiden* and the Tsar-Maiden in *The Hump-Backed Horse*—were the parts I had danced. Certainly, they were not insignificant, but most of them now appeared to me hopelessly flat and meaningless. The part of Odette-Odelia, on the other hand, I saw in a new light.

With the passage of years, I was not merely coming into my own professionally, I was storing up experiences of life, I was reflecting on the ballet, on symphony music and opera, particularly on Chaikovsky's music; I was reading. All this led me to realize the deep meaning that lay behind the image of the Swan. The music itself now

revealed a new significance to me. It was as though I were hearing it for the first time. I discovered in it new enchanting possibilities for the dance and was able to capture more fully its poetry. I benefited immensely by working with Vaganova, a hard taskmaster and a never-satisfied artist, who endeavoured to give a new interpretation of *Swan Lake*. The debt I owe to Vaganova is enormous, and for that alone (to say nothing of her other numberless services to our ballet) I shall ever retain grateful memories of her.

In this early period of my career, I was greatly influenced by my friendship with the Timme-Kachalovs—noble-minded, open-hearted people, artists in the fullest sense of the word.

We met in Yessentuki, where I had gone for a cure. As a result of my very unromantic ailment of the time I was often a victim of fatigue, I avoided darting, abrupt movements; I seldom smiled, was disinclined to run or jump. Besides, I was very shy by nature. Perhaps all this is partially responsible for that soft fluidity of movement and line which has often been held to my credit and which—who knows?—may have taken its origin, not in the spirit within, but in the bodily condition that brought me to Yessentuki. Nowever, since this little town in the Caucasus threw me in company with such wonderful people I can feel nothing but gratitude to it.

Yelizaveta Ivanovna Timme, an actress of the Leningrad Pushkin Drama Theatre, and her engineer husband, Professor Kachalov, began by making fun of my ailment, and inviting me to spend the remaining weeks after the cure with them on Lake Seliger. Their infectious vitality, their cordiality and friendliness, were amazingly effective in bringing me back to health. There, on Lake Seliger, my new friends awakened in me a deeper appreciation of the beauty of nature, one of them even composed a mock poem to the effect that my canoe and I were as inseparable as sisters. I ate fresh bread and milk fresh from the cow,

against the doctor's orders, and returned a new person, stronger in body, happier in mind, and more than ever eager for work.

After the theatre I would now often go straight to the Timme-Kachalovs', to find the house full of clever, witty people, always arguing about art. They loved art without self-conceit or affectation—as only those can love it for whom it is not a mere diversion but serious work to which they dedicate their entire lives. The place glowed with excitement and animation, and though the company invariably consisted of actors, painters and poets, there was not even a hint of Bohemian laxity, which, to my mind, only the hopelessly vulgar can couple with true art. The atmosphere in the cordial home of my friends was edifying, intellectual and chaste.

It was there that I made the acquaintance of some of our country's finest actors, writers and artists, among them Korchagina-Alexandrovskaia, Studentsov, Yuriev, Tolstoy, Pevtsov, Gorin-Goryainov and Vivien. Without the least air of superiority they taught me to appreciate more fully the beauty and import of the drama. And though there were no lengthy discourses on Stanislavsky's "system," its essence was brought home to me and I realized that the theatre's greatness hangs upon realistic and vivid acting.

"Do not fail to see it," my friends would often say to me of one or another play. And I would go docilely, knowing that I shall be asked how it impressed me and why just so, and that from the ensuing conversation I shall learn a great deal that will prove of benefit to me in my own field.

Yelizaveta Timme, herself an outstanding dramatic actress, was an ardent lover of the ballet. Some of my most cherished moments were those when I listened to her honest, well-meant criticism of my performances, in which she noted very tactfully where I had failed and where I had succeeded.

There were many things I could not understand at first. The reason for this was perhaps a too great reverence for accepted choreographic canons and rules. When I was told, "You should make your dancing more dramatic, more expressive," I would ask: "But how can I do it?" My friends would then proceed to tell me what went on in the soul of the Swan, describing shades of feeling I did not even suspect, or explaining why the last time I danced *Giselle* I had left the audience unmoved.

"I can't dance any other way," I would reply. "I don't know how to do what you ask of me. I wasn't taught to do it." The answer would be: "Neither do we know. You must find the way yourself. Watch the same emotions in the drama and think of how they can be translated into ballet."

At times things of this kind were said casually, and at times in the heat of general argument over scenic forms. And as I listened, eager to imbibe all that was said, or controvert it, if need be, it would seem to me that now at last I had grasped that which was most important to me as an artist. And indeed I was beginning to understand that there is but one great truth underlying all scenic art: like the actor the dancer must delve deeply into the character that is to be portrayed, capture its very substance, and subordinate everything else to that. I came to realize that no matter how perfect the outer delineation of the role, the portrait will be lifeless and trivial unless it is invested with inner meaning.

However, when it comes to characterization, the dramatic actor has an easier time of it; he has language at his disposal, often the text of a genius. We ballet dancers have nothing but the music and mute movement. Hence we must learn to translate thoughts into movement, and endow the dance with the force of spoken words.

How can it be done? Not a single book on the ballet, not a single dancer gives an answer to this question. There have indeed been dancers who succeeded in making their art as expressive as the spoken word. Alexander Pushkin in his *Eugene Onegin* immortalized the name of Yevdokia Istomina, surely not because "in mid-air she beats her feet together," but because this "Russian Terpsichore" shows the "soul's soaring flight," because she brought a deep significance to her dance.

Maria Taglioni, Anna Pavlova, as well as many of the Russian ballerinas I was fortunate enough to see on the stage, and whom I strove to emulate, were great because they were able to invest their dance with profound meaning and with noble, edifying sentiment, to capture the mood and beauty of the music. Their dance carried the appeal of great poetry. How were they able to achieve this, and how were we to achieve it?

No one could give me an answer to this question. There are no set rules for dancing of this kind, I am afraid. True, we have a stock of movements which may be likened to the letters of the alphabet. With their help we form the "words" and "sentences" of our dance. However, the alphabet of real language may serve one to compose lovely poetry and another, doggerel. . . . And just as there are no set rules for good poetry, so there are no set rules for imbuing the mute but sublime art of the dance with great and noble meaning, of making it vivid and lucid.

The poet, it goes without saying, must be a master of words: he must know their every *nuance*, their subtle power of suggestion. Likewise the ballet artist must be well versed in the art of movement. However, for the poet, a perfect command of language is merely a preliminary condition in his creative work: just so for the dancer a

perfect command of dance technique, or dance "alphabet" is only a preliminary condition to that which turns the "routine" of dancing into an art, and what is that?

Many years afterwards, when I read the concluding lines of Stanislavsky's *The Actor Prepares*, this question was partly answered. "Singers must practise their scales," he wrote, "dancers their exercises, and actors train and drill according to the 'system.' Set your mind on this, make it a daily practice, learn to know your own nature, discipline it, and given talent, you shall develop into a great artist."

"*Given talent...*" And talent is work. A vicious circle? I do not think so. Talent is work, true enough, but it is not only work as such, the actual performance of it, but the *ability* to work, plus an inordinate love for work, an *inner need* for it. Moreover, to this must be added the ability to feel, to think, to learn from books as well as from contact with people in all walks of life, to get at the bottom of people's characters, and perceive that which is essentially human and fine in them. To this must also be added the ability to observe life, to accumulate life's experiences and draw on their store for one's art; and yet a something else for the explanation and definition of which we have not yet found the precise words but which nevertheless is tangible and exists objectively. Nor do I deplore the fact that this "something" evades us, and cannot be reduced to a mathematical formula. And if one day it is, it will not affect the number of talents in any way.

To me it seems every person has talent. It is only a matter of discovering that talent in time and guiding it in the proper way. . . . As time goes on more and more talents will come of their own in all spheres of endeavour, including the ballet, of course. Things are heading in that direction.

I do not think I am digressing from the main trend of my story, from what had induced me to reflect on my art, to express it through

the media of thought and feeling. In the thirties, the period I am describing, I was still groping and the above ideas were still pretty vague in my mind. Yet it was precisely at that time, two decades ago, under the stimulating influence of the life around me—to which I was beginning to develop a more thoughtful and a more conscious approach—and under the influence of the Soviet art world, that I was acquiring the faculty of thinking over the meaning behind my parts. And it is this that helped me make my art worthy of the name.

At times the conversation and arguments at the Timme-Kachalovs' would go on to the small hours of the morning. One spring night, I remember, after an evening at the Timmes', I was taken by the actor Y. M. Yuriev for a walk through the city. It had seemed to me then that I knew Leningrad pretty well. But as I listened to Yuriev's quiet, fascinating narrative and was carried away by it, I realized at once how wrong I was and it made me reflect on the relativeness of human knowledge in general.

I couldn't imagine anybody knowing St. Petersburg, Petrograd and Leningrad better than this great actor. We walked through streets, which in the spurious twilight of Leningrad's "white nights" looked strangely airy and fantastic, and each house, as my companion spoke of it, seemed to breathe and live a life of its own. Now it would be an assembly hall which saw the making of Russia's history, now rooms housing a collection of valuable statuary, or the seat of the one-time Freemasons' Lodge, a garden with the world's most exotic blossoms growing in it, or a house once frequented by Pushkin.

The fullness and versatility of Soviet life, the discussions and contacts I made at the Timme-Kachalovs', close association with great and exacting Soviet artists—everything together constituted what I term my "coming of age school," which brought me within range of the theatre's broadest interests and profoundest ideals, the years I had

spent in getting my choreographic training and the first five years in the theatre I call my "apprenticeship." It was the best school an artist could wish for; life itself, the accomplishments I witnessed daily in the ballet and the drama, my friendships with really talented people enriched me beyond measure, suggesting a new interpretation of the Swan and Giselle, and preparing me to tackle the still more exacting tasks in the roles of Juliet and Tao Hoa.

In the early months of my acquaintance with the Timme-Kachalovs, I was rehearsing *Swan Lake*, and everything around me seemed coloured by that work. Whatever I read, saw and heard came to me through the magic prism of that ballet and my problems connected with it. Odette occupied my thoughts. To me she was the essence of all that was feminine, tender and noble in woman. How could I best express these qualities?

It must be mentioned here that in the production I was rehearsing, the part of Odette-Odelia was separated into two roles: Odette, the fairy Swan, and Odelia, real and diabolical. I was to dance Odette. According to the new libretto as well as the choreographical concept, Odette was truly a swan, whom Siegfried imagined to be a maiden. Hence I needed to find movements suited now to a real swan now to an imaginary maid.

It was not so much a matter of the technique of these movements, though they were difficult enough. I wanted to make my Swan reveal the torments of her soul, the tremulousness, the half-realized raptures of first love, its sanctity, utter devotion and power. I doubt whether I would have succeeded in conveying this had it not been for the advantages of "my coming of age school," for all I had learned in the home of the Timme-Kachalovs, in the circle of friends who were heart and soul in the life of the young Soviet theatrical culture, sharing in its successes, growth, joys and sorrows.

Soviet choreography, as it evolved, guided the ballet on towards greater depth and a wider range of themes. Our choreography and the great mass audience it now gained, an audience which was making the most exacting demands on the theatre, imperiously called for portrayals of greater significance. We advanced through trial and error, through search and failure, from the ultra-revolutionary *Red Whirlwinds* and the ultra-industrial *Bolt* towards new poetic and realistic performances. For the first time great literature and new revolutionary themes found their way to the ballet stage—Pushkin's *Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, Balzac's *Lost Illusions*, *The Red Poppy*, and *Flame of Paris*. In my own case I cannot over-estimate the importance of Pushkin and his *Fountain of Bakhchisarai*.

Before the appearance of the new Soviet ballets (I have in mind the best ones, of which there have been and are no small number, and of which there will be more in the future) ballet music, excepting the beautiful scores in many of the classic operas and ballets of Chai-kovsky, Glazunov and several West-European composers, was written with the sole object of helping the dancing and marking the rhythmic accents. It was required to be "dance music," easy to follow for the ballerina. No doubt, it is extremely important for ballet music to lend itself well to dancing. But if it is merely that the ballet might as well abandon the idea of re-creating the life of the human spirit on the stage. And to fail to do this would mean to strip of thought and inner emotion our ballet heroes and heroines, and to leave our Soviet audience unmoved. No matter how brilliant a performance is, if it is mere entertainment, if it is devoid of ideas, it will never satisfy the Soviet spectator.

Thus, the beautiful elegant form of the classic dance had to be invested with new *content*—this is how we understood the demand of our audience. This became clear to us as far back as two decades ago

when through a period of searchings, of failure and success, Soviet choreography came into its own.

In their earnest desire to realize the ballet's great possibilities, Soviet ballet-masters and dancers made music their starting-point. They discarded the old method of adapting the music to a stock of "dazzling" dances and began to proceed from the very idea of the music in moulding the pattern of the dance. This in itself made for deeper content and put before the dancer serious problems arising from the musical characterizations.

Thus a new chapter opened in ballet music. In it was achieved a cohesion of action and thought, which made the dance not only dynamic but replete with meaning. Dances were no longer staged because the tune of a *waltz* or *gallop* was "charming" but to express music with a strong and significant appeal.

The new music could overstep the bounds of the world of fantasy and depict the world of real people and living passions. Boris Asafyev succeeded in doing this in his music for *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*. With its clearly delineated musical portraits of Maria, Zarema and Khan Girei, its forceful score, profound and at the same time well adapted to dancing, this ballet struck a new note, showing the back-door to nymphs and dryads, charming creatures, no doubt, but by no means thinking ones.

Although the old Russian classical ballet presented in the main fairies and princesses with their sparkling variations, it, of course, was not altogether devoid of thought, soul and idea. This is true particularly of ballets in which performed great dancers, who brought fame to our ballet not only by their peerless technique but by their highly inspired art as well. Still, it was the ballerina who was technically brilliant, who could "dazzle," that was the dominant figure in the old Imperial ballet. Nymphs and dryads, by their shallow-

ness, helped to stifle thought and real human feeling on the ballet stage.

The Soviet era has made men and women take their rightful place as heroes and heroines of the ballet. This, of course, added immeasurably to the complexity of choreographic problems. But cannot the same be said of the problems of our age, are they not exceedingly complex, profound and interesting?

The new ideas brought by the Soviet age were gaining a firm foothold in what is perhaps one of the most conservative arts. "Everything is in man and everything for man!"—this underlying idea of Soviet humanism, the idea of boundless faith in man, in his power, beauty and will to fight for happiness, became the motto of the new Soviet ballet.

Formerly the idiom of the ballet was not merely conventional (that it still is and will remain) but often utterly impotent: the dance itself as a rule was not able to express anything without the help of mime. There would be a constant varying of mime and dance to make clear the meaning of the ballet. I think it significant that it was by drawing on the realism of Pushkin, the singer of Man, that we managed to break with this routine more effectively than in our attempts to do so in the new productions of old ballets. And from this point of view, it seems to me, *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, produced in 1934 by the Leningrad Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet, was a landmark in the development of Soviet choreography.

When this ballet was rehearsed the choreographer, R. V. Zakharov, and we of the cast tried to get at the bottom of the relationships between the fascinating characters depicted in Pushkin's poem. Without doing this it would be utterly impossible to re-create them, and bring out the idea of the poem. Ballet dances of a general character that can be transplanted from one ballet to another, with nothing required but

a change of costume, could never do for Pushkin. To interpret Pushkin the dance must be individualized, it must express only that which is intrinsically peculiar to the character of Maria or to Zarema, as the case may be, filled with gentle grief for the one, and with flaming jealousy for the other. The pattern may be woven of movements of flowing liquid grace, or flashing passion, depending on the character's state of mind at the moment.

In the "dialogue" between Maria and Zarema, the problem of "explaining" the feelings of the two women was thus solved without resorting to pantomime—the dance expressed everything. In the same way Maria's scene with Khan Girei, and the scenes in which she recalls her native land and her dear ones, as well as Zarema's dances, were all rendered comprehensive in the "action" of pure dance.

Maria is a part I keep working on all the time. This is also true of my other favourite roles. To the traits that I have found in the Swan and Giselle, Maria has added great humaneness and living texture. And whereas in my early portrayal of Maria an all-pervading grief was the dominant note, in later years the portrait changed, as though come to full-blown life. My pattern grew more intricate, brighter in colour, revealing many new facets to the character. Thus, into the colour scheme came tints of joy, youth, vivacity—in the dances of the first act. I love the part of Maria because the music and the dance express Pushkin's poetry so well, and as a result the ballet is subtle and stirring.

Pushkin's Maria, as I have already said, has made me revise a good deal in my previous roles. This is true, for example, of my Giselle. In Giselle I was faced with the problem of portraying love, hopeful and radiant in the first act, and tragic in the second, but in both acts so vital and powerful that it is able to conquer Myrta's evil will and even death itself. Therein lies the significance of *Giselle*; the ballet

is not merely a repetition of the old story of a simple maid's seduction by a wealthy noble (those who think so err on the vulgar side).

In rehearsing *Giselle* I tried to conjure up the image of a "simple maid," I sought instinctively, as I had done in *Maria* and in all my roles since, for that something, that "magic word," if you like, to turn me into *Giselle*, to make me live her tragedy, and believe in it so utterly as to make the public believe in it too.

The new significance which I read into my roles brought me closer to *Juliet*.

As in *Maria*, in *Juliet* I proceeded from the music. Soviet composers have made an invaluable contribution to the ballet—they have given it music with meaning and idea. And in moulding the pattern of our dance in *Romeo and Juliet* we were guided by the melodies of the music which revealed the spiritual world of our characters.

Prokofiev's score in many places was abrupt, bewildering and "jarred" on the dancer. The frequent change of rhythm was a decided handicap to the dancer. I remember when after the first presentation of the ballet, the dancers and all responsible for the production, including the composer, gathered, I could not refrain from saying: "Never was a story of more woe than dancing to Prokofiev's music, oh!" However this was merely a jest; what I earnestly thought was quite different: in *Romeo and Juliet*, more fully than in *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, there was harmony of thought and action, and despite the new modern note it struck, Prokofiev's music translated perfectly Shakespeare's tragedy. To my mind that accounts for the ballet's great success, for its undying loveliness.

When faced with the role of *Juliet*, fifteen years ago, I thought it was beyond my powers to tackle it. Indeed, the more I thought of the problems connected with the part, the more formidable they seemed

to me. In Juliet I knew must be revealed an eternal human theme, a theme of all time which Dante expressed in the line: "Love, that denial takes from none beloved." The atmosphere and the period, the feud between the Capulets and the Montagues, were all of secondary importance, as compared to that great theme.

Among all nationalities we find extant legends and poems telling the sad story of true love in conflict with circumstances, which, yet, are powerless to crush and destroy it. Such are Romeo and Juliet, Farkhad and Shirin, Tristan and Isolde. The theme is the same. Our problem was to give it Shakespearean amplitude. Where were we to find the power to do this? In hard work.

Shakespeare's portrait of Juliet is extremely concrete; it was important that in the ballet she should lose none of her Shakespearean colour. Shakespeare's text itself suggested to me the carefree gayety of the early scenes, the flutter and agitation of the masque, the rapture of the balcony scene, the chastity of the marriage scene, the courageous overcoming of the fear of the tomb. . . . The outer image I sought in the portraits of the Renaissance, notably in the women of Botticelli's Primavera—Spring—is not that Juliet herself?

Prokofiev's score, dramatic, sensitive, close to the modern heart and at the same time consonant with Shakespeare, was a real inspiration. We had but to follow it in every movement to mould our dance into plastic forms, provided we made the most of the ballet "alphabet," inadequate though it is. Lavrovsky, the choreographer, sought to express perfectly the music and with it the great content of Shakespeare's tragedy.

It was not without a good deal of experimenting, however, that *Romeo and Juliet* was produced. And I must say here that in recent years we had begun to realize more and more the ballet dancer's dramatic potentialities, and acquired valuable experience along

these lines. This is to some measure responsible for our boldness in undertaking to translate into ballet what is one of Shakespeare's greatest plays.

A play of all time, it lives on the stage, expanding in significance, gaining in meaning with every age. Shakespeare is so profound that we are ever discovering new possibilities in him. Thus, when several years after the Leningrad production, I began to rehearse Juliet in the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow, where Prokofiev's ballet was being revived, I saw quite a different Juliet. I perceived her illumined by all of my life's experiences, by the years of war and victory.

More than ever Juliet appeared to me now as a character of strong will, ready to fight and die for happiness. This made me impart, for example, a new and more powerful dramatic quality to the scene in which Juliet defies her father and refuses to marry Paris whom she does not love; I tried to express in my dance Juliet's resolve, her defiant and courageous spirit. The new Juliet to me was possessed of such moral fibre which under different circumstances would make of her a heroine ready to die for a patriotic cause, one close to us in spirit. Our great idea was to imbue this tragedy written four hundred years ago with the force of a contemporary theme and make it ring new. In that sense *Romeo and Juliet* was a *new* ballet.

And here I must make a reservation. While I favour greatly present-day themes new ballet does not necessarily presuppose a contemporary setting and a modern theme. The modern theme in the ballet is a problem which we are tackling now: but it cannot be solved easily and simply. By new art, as well as by new ballet, we mean all that is consonant with our world outlook and our aspirations, all that assists us in our struggle and brings us closer to our great goals. That is why Pushkin, Beethoven, Shakespeare and Leonardo da Vinci are so near and dear to us. That is why we claim that the range of themes and

subjects for the ballet has broadened immensely: from the battles of the Civil War, and the gallantry of the young people who fought in it, to the revolt of Spartacus, the Roman gladiator, from the struggle for peace in Italy to the philosophic poems of Nizami. All this can now be rendered by the new choreography and is already being shown on our stage.

Thus when we were staging *Romeo and Juliet* in Moscow, to us, possessing the heightened sensibility that came of the war and its sufferings, it was a ballet steeped in our own age.

An actor lives, stores up impressions and experiences, little thinking that they may prove some day of great value in his work and even in some concrete role. But when he is given a role particularly suited to his temperament, and in which he can best realize himself as an artist, he "suddenly" feels that the whole course of his previous existence was, as it were, one long preparation for that role. All his memories, encounters, conversations, and even his minor thoughts and observations, the books he has read, are thrown into sharp focus, sifted and crystallized, to shape that one role, which for the moment has blotted out everything else. This is what happened to me in regard to my Juliet, a new Juliet now, her character enhanced by my own experiences in the war years.

However, it was not a matter of any direct connection between my war-time experiences and my dancing. But it was that I felt more than ever drawn close to the people, whose gallant performance on the home and battle fronts saved our honour, human dignity and possibility to work in our chosen fields, from being trampled in the dust. I saw how close-knit Soviet people were in their common cause. Their every deed spoke of their devotion to the Motherland. They were giving their all, spiritually and physically, to the war effort. The realization of all

this led me to dance Juliet—my first post-war role—differently in the Moscow production. I now wished to put greater emphasis on such features in Juliet as moral courage and resolve.

During the war all Soviet artists tuned their life wholly to the life of the people, realizing the people's keen need for them.

The cannon roared but the muses were not silent. The theatre continued to edify and delight the people by its art. From our fighting men we received daily corroboration of how dear the theatre was to them. Like most actors and dancers, I was getting mail from the front. The men who wrote to me were strangers but they were dear as brothers because they were fighting gallantly and courageously to save our country, to save our culture and art.

Among my mail were letters from Leningrad's fighting men who had seen me dance in that city before the war and remembered the ballets in which I appeared. There was one letter in particular that impressed me deeply. I received it in Molotov where the Kirov Theatre carried on after evacuation. My correspondent, Alexei Dorogush, writing from a village just cleared of the fascists, said: "In one of the cottages we found a picture of you as Odette in *Swan Lake*. The picture has a few bullet holes but all the same the boys took it to their quarters and while we're having a lull the orderly's standing assignment is to place fresh flowers in front of it every day."

Of course such marks of attention were pleasant and touching from those who fought and faced death every minute, and yet could think of art and of the theatre. But there is another reason for my quoting the letter. It was one among many things that brought to me a greater awareness of the close ties existing between the Soviet artist and the people. It made me feel the great debt I owe to the Soviet fighting men, who are able to cherish the memory of a joy once received in the theatre.

At every concert, at every performance, we actors and dancers witness an almost reverential attitude towards art on the part of our Soviet audience. This is to me an everlasting source of inspiration and delight. And it is clear how hard the Soviet dancer and actor must work to live up to this attitude.

During the war most of our spectators at the Bolshoi Theatre were men in uniform. Even if they came to Moscow for no more than a day or two Soviet army men made it a point to go to the theatre. This was indicative of our Soviet people's and our army's great impulse for poetry and high culture, of the loftiness of the people's spirit. How could this not give the artist food for thought, not urge one to create new art, to broaden and deepen one's previous interpretations? In Molotov, whenever we performed to army audiences we got the warmest reception imaginable from a very packed house. I remember dancing in Leningrad, in 1944, before an audience of wounded soldiers, on an improvised stage platform in the Anichkov Palace, and feeling greater elation than on the brilliantly illumined stage of the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow.

It is not with a mind to showing a direct influence of the events of the war on some particular role of mine that I speak at length of those stirring and unforgettable years. I merely wish to point out that a crucial period in our history was able to suggest much that enriched and ennobled our art.

In the days of the war, I pondered perhaps more than in other times over the essence of contemporary art and how it could best dedicate itself to expressing the aspirations of the people, of all who worked and fought.

Life was fostering in me an even greater devotion to my people.

When I first went abroad in 1945 and saw the deplorable state of theatrical art in Austria, I could not help admiring my own country

for having preserved the theatre and even added to its glory in the trying years of the war. In 1949 I attended a women's congress in defence of peace, held in Italy. I was horrified at the contrasts existing in that country of breath-taking scenery, at the destitution of the poor and the fabulous luxury of the hotels where the Americans stayed. I saw men and women strikers, who refused to unload American guns, distributing the newspaper *Unità* despite the threat of severe reprisals. I was impressed by the trust and devotion with which hundreds and thousands of simple folk regarded us, Soviet citizens. A Soviet artist cannot remain indifferent to such things and they cannot but leave their imprint on his art.

Some time ago I was in China where I could see how the example of the Soviet people's constructive effort and labour heroism was being taken up by this great Eastern country, how sacred and indestructible was the friendship existing between the two mighty nations—China and the Soviet Union. And my soul, the soul of a Soviet citizen and a Soviet dancer, expanded.

Here, too, it would be wrong to speak of any direct effect of my impressions on my dancing; it is not that after visiting China I was dancing Tao Hoa, the heroine of Glier's *Red Poppy* differently. I was not. But I understood and loved her people more warmly, and having observed some of their traits at first hand, was able to portray them on the stage with greater faithfulness as well as to broaden and render more colourful the character I represented.

It had long been my ambition to dance Tao Hoa—Red Poppy—the heroine from whom the ballet takes its name. Tao Hoa is a true daughter of her people and it is a role of a heroic order, requiring, together with lyricism, the expression of valour and great courage.

New problems and new difficulties confronted me in Tao Hoa. To show this brave heroine of fighting China, a tender-hearted and gallant

Chinese girl, to our people, friend and brother of the Chinese people, was a responsible and difficult task indeed.

Spiritually I was prepared for Tao Hoa by my previous roles, notably by Juliet. But Tao Hoa dies for a future happiness, of which she has a clear vision and in which she believes. And although she lived in the twenties I wanted to impart to her certain features of Chinese girls of our own day. Tao Hoa as a character grows before our eyes. I tried to make that growth convincing and to show its logical consummation in the great sacrifice Tao Hoa makes of her life—for the sake of the people's cause. From a dim realization that Ma Li-chen and his revolutionary friends are fighting for freedom, to a conscious struggle for free China—that is the road Tao Hoa travels. Tao Hoa dies with a smile on her lips, knowing that after her, her people will win happiness.

Naturally, after my visit to China, where I saw Chinese women and girls, as brave and valiant as Tao Hoa, after I came to know and appreciate her people better, my Chinese heroine became dearer and nearer to me.

Tao Hoa has made me want to attempt other heroic roles. I should like to test my powers as Joan of Arc, or our immortal war heroine Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya, as well as other strong women characters of classic and modern literature.

The very features that I sought for and found in the Swan, in Giselle, in Maria, in Juliet and Tao Hoa—poetry, chastity of spirit, courage, faith in man, in man's reason and will to do good—are inherent in the new person born of the Soviet age. A champion of peace and justice, the new Soviet citizen has a noble and big heart. He is modest and selflessly devoted to his Homeland. He is the new man we meet and see everywhere and the qualities he possesses

must be portrayed in contemporary ballet if we wish to do justice to our age.

However, this is no easy matter. But ballet, in general, is hard work. So is producing anything—growing grain, making machines, writing poetry. There can be no art unless one gives it a lifetime of toil and devotion, even more, for if one possessed two lives—to paraphrase Pavlov, the eminent Russian physiologist—and gave them both wholly to art, one would still not be giving enough.

I think it is in this spirit that all Soviet artists work and it is in this spirit that the composer, the libretto writer, the choreographer and the ballet dancer are today earnestly co-operating and using all the means at their disposal to produce new ballets that will be a glory to the Soviet age.

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